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ABSTRACT

The booklet provides a history of the Right-to-Read, Austin (Texas) Learning Center project and, based on the experiences at Austin, provides a guide to establishing a Right-to-Read project in a learning center. The general problems, needs, and experiences of the project are described and discussed as they evolved, under the following headings: goals, locating the facility, personnel needs, use of volunteer tutors, staffing and scheduling, testing, student records, the instructional program, equipment, recruitment and publicity, developing materials, and a cost estimate for establishing a Right-to Read/adult basic education (ABE) learning center. A summary indicates that two years of experience with a coordinated Right-to-Read/ABE learning center have shown that such centers can have a great impact on the communities they serve. It is believed that the experiences and conclusions set forth in the booklet can be adapted to fit the needs of any community-based Right-to-Read/learning center site. Forms used at the Austin center are appended, with comments on their use. (Author/NH)

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ESTABLISHING RIGHT-TO-READ PROGRAMS IN COMMUNITY-BASED ADULT LEARNING CENTERS

May 1974

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FOREWORD

This booklet was written to serve two purposes: (1) to describe the goals and needs of the R.R/Austin Learning Center project and (2) to provide a basis for discussion before establishing a R.R tutor-training service center in the R.R/Austin project.

The booklet reports the general problems, needs, and experiences of the R.R project as they evolved. Where necessary for the reader's understanding, statistics are included in the narrative, but this document is not intended to be any sort of final report.

Prior to the drafting of this booklet, subsidiary programs of the Austin Learning Center were scrutinized to determine if methods or materials unique to its operation were pertinent to the overall needs of the R.R/Austin Learning Center. It is believed that the experiences and conclusions set forth in the following pages can be adapted to fit the needs of any community-based R.R/Learning Center site.

The Division of Adult and Continuing Education, Texas Education Agency, and the Industrial and Business Training Bureau, Division of Extension, The University of Texas at Austin, combined their efforts to produce and publish this booklet.

Since then beginning, Adult Education Learning Centers have been really introduced in the education and therefore, the reading attitude of adults. Even so, the entire gamut of learning centers in the National Rights-to-Read Program is not undergoing. The decision of the National Rights-to-Read Program to phase out community learning centers after fiscal year 1975 precludes learning center participation to strong or might otherwise have been expected. This fact is regrettable. The few of us around the nation fortunate enough to have participated in the R.R. community learning centers often are convinced that the marriage of learning centers to the R.R. program can produce exciting and formidable educational possibilities. A self-engaged learning center that has as one of its major offerings a reading class with diagnostic, prescriptive, and remediation capabilities probably will be a formidable force in any community. Learning centers offer several unique advantages that Rights-to-Read projects can tap and profit from.

1. Generally speaking, the individualized concept of instruction found in learning centers is particularly efficacious with nonreaders or poor readers. This fact, today, is realized that individualization often gives the student an opportunity to prevent himself from the disclosure of his weaknesses shortcomings that a class environment seems to inevitably bring about.

2. Because a learning center is, by definition, an infinite resource and materials resource center, opportunities for varying the instruction for a reading student are immeasurably greater. It is obvious that, as the variety of instruction and materials increase, the likelihood that the student will drop out decreases.

3. In a learning center, with its multiplicity of educational opportunities and resource over sections of society, a student who enters with the single goal of reading

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APPENDIX

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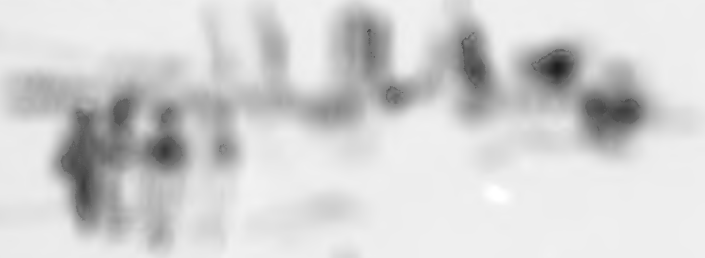

the most minimal supervision. The on-site supervisor must be prepared to work a great deal with the specialist volunteers in order to involve them in other facets of the program, and therefore, increase their usefulness.

A second major category of volunteers might be termed—for want of a better term—nonspecialized volunteers. These are persons who hear about the program and simply volunteer their services. With proper preparation, these persons can be fitted into most of the areas of need that a program might develop. As a general rule, however, unless some area in which these volunteers work turns out to be of particular interest to them, they tend to drift away after a few months.

Utilizing both of the above-mentioned types of volunteers as reading aides in reading instruction offers them a strong attachment point for their interests and can make them valuable assets to the program. Epner's text[2] on instructing reading aides is a valuable tool, even though there are differences between professional aides and volunteers. Of particular value is her curriculum outline.[3]

Another way to use volunteer tutors is to allow them to specifically deal with their specialities. This is being done in the R_2R/Austin program in which two outreach centers are staffed entirely by volunteers. These centers teach only specific GED areas and for specific amounts of time. A volunteer coordinator is in charge of activities, supervises classes, and takes care of materials requirements.

[2] Marcia Epner, *Reading Aid for Reading Aides* (New York: College Skills Center, 1974).

[3] Marcia Epner (curriculum outline for San Antonio College, San Antonio, Texas, 1973).

STAFFING AND SCHEDULING

The number of staff members needed to adequately operate an educational program will vary according to the hours of operation and the primary type of instruction offered. At least one qualified instructor must be present in each location during all hours of operation. In any program of individualized instruction, students work independently until a problem arises that they cannot handle. In a typical Adult Basic Education classroom situation, a teacher and an aide can be expected to handle approximately twenty students per class hour. In a typical English-as-a-second-language (ESL) situation, however, the number of students that a teacher and aide can handle will drop to about twelve to fourteen or even lower, depending on how advanced the students are. In a typical R_2R situation, the number is reduced even more drastically; a teacher and aide can reasonably expect to deal with about eight students per class hour.

Generally, it is difficult to estimate accurately the number of students a learning center can expect to attract. A rough estimate, based on the R_2R/Austin Learning Center experience in its outreach programs, might be that only approximately one-half of 1 percent of those persons who need the program will ever make the initial investigation—i.e., will attend the first few meetings that a center will hold. In other words, if census figures show that an area has approximately one thousand functionally illiterate persons (i.e., with less than an eighth-grade education) within its boundaries, then the usual R_2R/ABE program could expect to attract around five to ten persons the first few nights. This figure may be increased somewhat by an intensive advertising campaign, including a door-to-door campaign, newspaper and radio advertisements, perhaps television advertisements or a billboard in the neighborhood, and particularly posters in all places where the public congregates (self-service laundries, supermarkets, filling stations, churches, etc.).

As news of the program spreads in the neighborhood by word of mouth, the figures will begin to move upward. Programs that are run outside the community or neighborhood are inherently unstable, however, and every care should be taken to understand the neighborhood before setting up a program. The greatest cause for student attrition in R_2R/ABE outreach projects has been shown to be transient teachers. As was pointed out earlier, students form dependencies on teachers; if the teacher leaves, so does the student.

In an area made up of or dominated by one ethnic group, it is best that both teacher and aide also belong to that group. In church facilities, a qualified member of the church or, at least, the same religion is a very powerful and practical addition to the staff.

The importance of carefully surveying an area before making any commitments cannot be overstressed. Potential students, facilities, public places, and advertising opportunities and prevailing neighborhood sentiment are all of crucial importance to a new program.

Equally important is the economic status of the neighborhood or area. If a sizable number of its adult citizens are out of work, a daytime program is feasible; but, if most of the potential students are working, evening programs are clearly the best approach. The Austin project operates its downtown location thirteen hours a day, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays and eight hours on Fridays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. All outreach programs, however, operate only in the evenings, with peak loads coming at about 7:00 p.m. at all sites. Staff and scheduling for all sites presently under R_2R/Austin Learning Center control are shown in the following chart.

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R_3 R/AUSTIN LEARNING CENTER ORGANIZATION

ABE and ESL and R/AUSTIN R_3 R/AUSTIN LEARNING CENTER

Hours: Mon. thru Thurs.–8:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m.
Fri.–8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Staff:
[illegible]
1 Reading Specialist
5 Instructors
6 Clerk/Aides
5 Part-Time Aides
1 Director/Coordinator
1 Director/Coordinator
1 Half-Time Lib/ABE Media Specialist
1 Part-Time Instructor

Mountopolis Lib.
Hours:
Mon., Wed., Fri.–8:00 a.m.-12:00 noon
Tues., Thurs.–1:00-9:00 p.m.
Staff:
1 Teacher

Oak Springs Lib.
Hours:
Tues., Thurs.–6:00-9:00 p.m.
Staff:
1 Teacher

Carrollton Lib.
Hours:
Mon. thru Thurs.–6:00-9:00 p.m.
Staff:
5 Teachers

Mt. Olive Bapt. Ch.
Hours:
Tues., Thurs.–6:30-9:30 p.m.
Staff:
1 Teacher

Avondale St. Sch.
Hours:
Tues., Thurs.–6:00-8:00 p.m.
Staff:
1 Teacher

Austin St. Shop.
Hours:
Tues., Thurs.–9:00-10:30 a.m.
Tues., Thurs., Fri.–1:00-4:00 p.m.
Wed.–9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon
Staff:
2 Teachers, 1 Aide

Travis St. Sch.
Hours:
Mon., Wed., Fri.–12:00 noon-1:55 p.m.
Tues., Thurs.–6:00-8:30 p.m.
Staff:
1 Teacher

Allendale Pub. Lib.
Hours:
Tues., Wed.–6:00-9:00 p.m.
Staff:
5 Tutors

Twin Oaks Pub. Lib.
Hours:
Tues., Wed.–6:00-9:00 p.m.
Staff:
2 Tutors

TESTING

Diagnosis of reading difficulties is essential to any good reading program. An individualized approach to reading or other adult education can be taken only after each student's needs are accurately identified.

In the R/2/Austin Learning Center, both standardized and informal testing are used. Informal observation and testing are used initially with each adult entering the program. Adults tend to be wary of anything labeled a test because most remember experiencing failure on tests in school. So as not to scare such students away, several informal methods to assess their abilities are used.

Upon registration, each student is asked to fill out an information sheet. (See appendix.) Besides getting the vital statistics needed for records (i.e., name, address, birthday, etc.), the center is able to assess the student's spelling, reading, grammar, and communication skills. Although the information sheet in no way provides a completely accurate picture of a student's capabilities, it does suggest a starting point for a teacher.

When an adult indicates that he or she plans to attend, the student is given the reading comprehension section of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Form W, either Level I or Level II.* (This test is given only to students with at least a second-grade word-recognition skill.) From this test, a reading comprehension level, as well as a score on literal comprehension in inferential comprehension, is obtained. This standarized test gives a much more accurate comprehension score than our information sheet, enabling the reading teacher or one of the instructors to assign appropriate materials. Of course, informal assessment is continuous and equally important in providing for individual needs throughout a student's course of study.

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*Bjorn Karlsen, Richard Madden, and Eric Gardner, *Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1966).

An informal reading inventory (IRI) is given to all nonreaders or primary-level readers. The IRI yields a word-recognition level for each student, as well as identifying weaknesses in word-recognition skill. It is perhaps the most valuable tool for individualizing instruction for each student. Occasionally tests corresponding to commercial materials used in teaching are also given to students along with the IRI.

The criterion-referenced test contained in *The Fountain Valley Support System in Reading*[7] offers another means of assessment. This system is very specific in pinpointing weaknesses in reading. Also, it is cross-referenced to materials the instructor may use in helping overcome the problems identified. Unfortunately, this system has been cross-referenced with only a limited number of adult education materials. When the details are completed for cross-referencing teaching alternatives useful for adults and available in ABE learning centers, it will be an extremely valuable tool in individualizing instruction.

The only other standardized test administered at this time in the R, R/Austin Learning Center is the Reading Everyday Activities in Life (REAL) test.[8] This is a test of a student's ability to read materials often found in daily life. Nine reading activities are included in the REAL test. Originally, this test was not scheduled to be included in the testing program at the Austin project. However, at the insistence of the Pacific T & TA Corporation, the organization responsible for evaluating community-based sites for R, R across the nation, the REAL test was administered. It is given as a pretest, and six months later, as a posttest. Pacific T & TA Corporation scores the test booklets and returns the results to each individual program.

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[7] Richard L. Zweig Associates, Inc., *The Fountain Valley Support System in Reading* (Huntington Beach, California: Richard L. Zweig Associates, Inc., 1972).

[8] Marilyn Liebman, *Reading Everyday Activities in Life* (New York: Cal Press, Inc., 1972).

The importance of accurate diagnosis and evaluation in a reading or other educational program cannot be overemphasized. No remediation can be successful unless there is an accurate assessment of the individual's needs. As noted above, in the R. R. Center program, this diagnosis takes two forms: standardized tests and informal reading inventories and observations. Both types of assessment are believed to be necessary.

It should be pointed out that, for the most part, scoring of the tests used in R. R. Center is not complicated. With proper initial supervision, any teacher (or volunteer) can be taught to assess a student's abilities. Standardized and informal assessment tools are essential in education programs and constitute one major area of in-service training and staff development.

STUDENT RECORDS

Keeping complete records of a student seems almost inevitably to become a cumbersome process. Several types of information are needed in the following fields in order to adequately understand and assess a student.

1. Past academic and personal history. (When did the student drop out? What grade was he in? Why did he drop out?)
2. Placement. (What method/test instrument was used initially? What means were used to validate or correct his placement?)
3. Materials used. (What books, supplementary materials, progress tests, etc. were studied?)
4. Progress. (Comparison of pretests and post-tests, GED examinations, etc.)
5. Attendance. (When did he register? How often does he attend? How consistent is he? What is his attitude?)

A record folder for each student in which most of the above-mentioned information can be written has been in use for quite some time at the R. R. center. (See appendix.) In addition to the information written on the folder, pertinent

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

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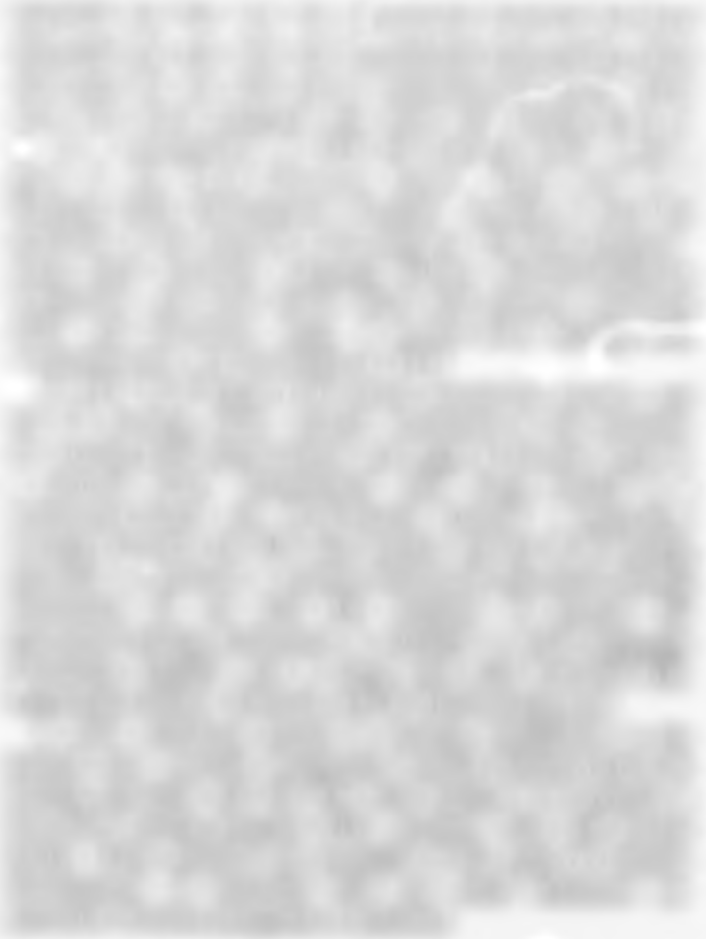

well as instruction and enrichment centers, a far larger percentage of the needs of students can be dealt with. For organizations contemplating development of similar programs, the following points should be remembered.

1. All staff members—full-time, part-time, everybody—must operate as if they were one team. Distinctions between or among programs must be minimized.
2. Initial research into community needs and program development along lines that treat the identified needs are essential.
3. Scheduling to serve the needs and convenience of the neighborhood is very important.
4. Centralized record keeping, materials and hardware inventory, and staffing are of considerable aid to the success of the program.
5. Student recruitment and follow-up are absolutely essential. As many of the various public media as possible should be utilized. Continuous recruitment is necessary.
6. Volunteer tutors are the salvation of most R_2 R/ABE projects—at least with regard to community-based sites—and they must be carefully trained in the same manner as are paid instructors. A volunteer tutor-training outline[13] from this program is available.

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[13] Marcia Epner (curriculum outline for San Antonio College, San Antonio, Texas, 1973).

APPENDIX

THE INFORMATION SHEET

During the early months of 1969, it was felt that the placement tests that were being used at the ABE Learning Center in Austin were inadequate for initial placement. The existing tests, W.R.A.T. and the Standard Oral Reading Paragraphs test, were exceedingly slow and cumbersome and for our purposes inaccurate. A new test, it was unanimously felt by the staff, was needed: one that would give an immediate and at least generally accurate placement; one that would be quickly evaluated; and equally important one that would not cause anxiety or hostility on the part of the student.

The staff undertook to write such a placement instrument. It was felt that several things might as well be accomplished at once, and the test was devised so that the student would feel that he was filling out an application questionnaire, rather than taking an examination. A considerable amount of information is necessary in order to complete each student's file folder, so questions relating to the file-folder information were used as the basis for the placement instrument. At a later time, the student's instructor or the teacher-aide can transfer the information from the placement instrument to the file.

Briefly, the rationale for the placement instrument is as follows: if the student can read or write at all, then the questions coming under the *A* section can most likely be answered. If the student goes no further than the *A* section, then obviously he is an *A*-level student and should be placed in the appropriate work-texts. If a student forges ahead into the *B* section but fades before he finishes, he should be placed in the terminal *A* group or into the low *B*-section material. If the student goes through the *B* group, answering the questions as they stand with accurate and clear answers, then [illegible] he should be placed into the top end of the *B* group [illegible] *C*-level material ready for him. If the

student sweeps right on into the C-level questions and answers them correctly without misspellings, bad punctuation, or grammar and has understandable responses that are pertinent to the questions, then the student should be placed in GED preparatory material and readied for the GED tests or should proceed with the GED tests.

The placement instrument accomplishes at least three purposes simultaneously: it offers a gross placement for the incoming student; it accumulates necessary information for the student's information file; it puts the student at ease in the sense that the student feels that he is still in the preliminary stages of his enrollment and is not yet under stress. Also, the instrument gives the instructor a good beginning for judging the student's usable vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and reading ability. All of this information is valuable in setting up a program of individualized instruction for the student.

INFORMATION SHEET

A

1. Write or print your name _____

2. What is your address? _____

3. What is the date today? _____

4. Do you have a telephone? _____
   What is the number? _____

5. Are you married? _____ What is your husband's name (or wife's name)? _____

6. When is your birthday? _____

7. When were you born? _____

B

1. Are you a citizen of the United States? _____

2. Are you a citizen by birth or by naturalization? _____

3. Do you maintain private transportation? _____

4. If so, what type? _____

5. Do you possess a valid driver's license? _____

6. What is your ethnic origin? _____

7. Are you a registered voter in the State of Texas? _____

8. If you are presently employed, please indicate whether you are employed on a full-time or a part-time basis.

_____

9. How long have you worked for your present employer on the job that you now hold? _____

10. Do you subscribe to an Austin newspaper? _____

11. Do you subscribe to other newspapers or magazines? _____

12. If so, please list them. _____

13. Do you own (or have ready access to) a television set? _____

14. Do you own a radio, or is one available to you? _____

15. Please answer the following questions with either *fine, good, fair, poor, or bad*.

    a. How is your vision? _____

    b. How is your hearing? _____

    c. How is your general health? _____

16. Please write in words the number of times you estimate that you visit the doctor each year. _____

17. How did you learn about this program? _____

C

1. Please write a brief and pertinent paragraph explaining how you were made aware of this program.

_____

2. Please write a paragraph telling the aspirations that you have that you feel can be enhanced or furthered by the program that you are now beginning.

3. Please write a paragraph about yourself as you see yourself. You may reiterate the information that you have already given in the above paragraph.

4. Give me the information that you feel will be most helpful in aiding an instructor who is trying to prepare a program of instruction suited to your particular needs.

THE MACHINE PHILOSOPHY

The Machine Golden Chosen on the following two pages was developed by the Humble Robot Learning Center staff in an effort to continue in our board on information useful to robot machines and instructions required by the Texas Robotics Agency regarding all of their projects. Briefly, a machine can determine, absent or a glance everything he needs to know about a problem in another room if he has never worked with that machine.

FACE